

Testimony to Public Health Committee – Jody Bishop-Pullan, RDH, BS
House Bill 5541-An Act Concerning Services Provided by Dental Professionals and
Certification for Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioners

My name is Jody Bishop-Pullan. I am a Registered Dental Hygienist, employed by the City of Stamford Department of Health and Social Services as a dental case manager. I speak in favor of HB 5541 because it would expand access to oral health care for thousands of low-income families who seek healthcare from public health facilities. My position with the Health Department is to oversee the oral health program and to ensure children receive preventive and restorative care.

The City of Stamford Health Department Dental Program includes screening and referral for 12,000 elementary and middle school students, educational programs, sealant placement and clinical preventive and treatment services. We treat HUSKY insured children as well as the uninsured. Some families opt to use our services because they no longer can afford the high cost of dental offices. Due to our intense efforts in the area of preventive services, our rate of referral has decreased during my nine years of work with the City. The treatment rate, however, never changes-it remains at about 49%.

Getting a child to treatment often requires intense case management, as many of the families we care for have complex lives and face multiple barriers to utilizing care. The ideal setting to provide services to low-income families is in schools where children are, neighborhood community clinics where families live or mobile clinics that travel to the clients. These sites reduce barriers to care such as transportation and time away from work and school. Yet we know our school based clinics and public health facilities operate on shoestring budgets and funding is scarce. An Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner provides an affordable alternative for non-profit public health facilities to deliver care.

Prevention and early intervention are key to decreasing the risk of infections and occurrence of more complex dental problems as well as decreasing the cost of oral health care. An Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner provides primary and secondary prevention. The concept is built on the fundamental education and philosophy of prevention and access to care that Dr. Alfred Civilian Fones envisioned and developed for Dental Hygiene in Bridgeport 99 years ago.

The crisis in dental healthcare and how to address it is of national concern. Studies by the Pew Charitable Trust, the Kellogg Foundation and others are ongoing and there is support nationally for workforce development, including midlevel providers. There is support from professionals organizations such as the American Association of Public Health Dentistry and a recent survey of the public published by the Kellogg Foundation showed that 76% of American surveyed support training for midlevel dental providers.

Please support HB 5541. Thank you.